



News Release

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For Release: June 18, 2004
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SEEKS COMMENTS ON DRAFT IMPACT STATEMENT OF LOWER COLORADO RIVER MULTI-SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California have drafted an Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report evaluating the issuance of a 50-year incidental take permit for threatened and endangered species that may be affected by the operations and maintenance of the lower Colorado River. The agencies are making the reports available for review and are seeking public comment.

The lower Colorado River, from north of Lake Mead to the Mexican border, is an important source of water and hydropower to the states of Arizona, California, and Nevada. Each state diverts water from the river for agricultural, municipal and industrial purposes. This water travels as far as the cities of Los Angeles and San Diego in California and Phoenix and Tucson in Arizona. The primary farming areas in the Imperial Valley of California are also supplied with Colorado River water. Reclamation operates the large dams on the river for flood control, water storage and hydropower generation and maintains the river channel through stabilization, dredging and other programs.

These federal and state actions have resulted in significant changes to the physical and biological character of the river. Present operations and maintenance and changes of the points of diversion for water deliveries proposed by Reclamation and the states will adversely impact habitats and could result in incidental take of species protected under the Endangered Species Act – the southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, desert tortoise, bonytail and humpback chubs and razorback sucker. Habitat of 20 non-listed species, as well as the candidate yellow-billed cuckoo, would also be adversely affected.

To minimize and mitigate the effects of dam operations and water diversions on wildlife, the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP) has developed a Habitat Conservation Plan in a process involving participants and stakeholders from potentially affected or interested groups on the lower Colorado River.

“Taking” of threatened and endangered species is prohibited under the Endangered Species Act. However, the Service, under limited circumstances, may issue permits to take threatened or endangered wildlife species when such taking is incidental to, and not the purpose of, otherwise lawful activities.

The conservation plan provides for the creation of 8,132 acres of riparian, marsh and backwater habitats and establishes a fund for the maintenance of existing habitats to offset adverse effects. The level of conservation contained in the proposed plan exceeds what is needed for mitigation and will contribute to the recovery of listed species.

The LCR MSCP has submitted the draft habitat conservation plan to the Service together with a request for permission to take listed species. The Service has weighed the alternatives of issuing such a permit in the draft Environmental Impact Statement and Report and is now seeking public comments before making its decision on issuing an incidental take permit.

These documents are voluminous, so we suggest that interested parties obtain them from the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program website at <http://www.lcrmsep.org>. Alternatively, CDs containing electronic copies of these documents can be obtained by writing to: Mr. Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021 or calling 602-242-0210; or to Mr. Glen Gould, Bureau of Reclamation, P.O. Box 61470, LC-2011, Boulder City, NV 89006-1470 or calling 702-293-8702.

Written comments can be submitted to Mr. Steve Spangle at the address above (please telephone Service administrative staff at 602-242-0210 24 hours prior to hand- and courier-delivered packages) or by facsimile to 602-242-2513. All comments must be received by August 18, 2004.

Written and oral comments will also be accepted at the following public meetings:

July 20, 2004 6:30 p.m. Henderson, Nevada Henderson Convention Center Vista Room 200 S. Water Street	July 21, 2004 6:30 p.m. Blythe, California City Council Chambers 235 North Broadway	July 22, 2004 6:30 p.m. Phoenix, Arizona AZ Dept. of Water Resources 500 N. 3 rd Street
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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov> website.

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